

Cambodia... peace on the move

There is a non-violent movement in Cambodia. Known as Ponleu Khmer, this movement consists of monks, nuns, women's groups, student associations, and human rights groups. They have organized several activities, turning out thousands of people.

One of the coalition's first projects was the organizing of the Dhamma Yietra, a walk for peace. One spectator testified, "People were so afraid of elections. Here in Phnom Penh they had started to stockpile rice... but the walk has relieved us all, inspired us with hope."

One week later, June 4 through 6, the coalition organized a three day peace festival before the final results of the election were announced. The festival consisted of silent meditations for peace at various key points in the city to congratulate the Cambodian people on the successful elections.

On the final day of the festival, one thousand people gathered to listen to the words of Maha Ghosananda and to sit in silent meditation, despite a rain shower. Afterwards, the crowd, joined by thousands along the way, paraded a boat made of banana leaves to the river front, where they launched it into the Tonle Sap River, symbolically sending off all of the violence and hatred of the past twenty years. People piled money into the boat before it was launched as a symbol of ridding themselves of their own hatred, greed and delusion.

Tirelessly, the coalition's committee met the next day to plan the following event. When they presented their next plan to Maha Ghosananda, he laughed, "You all understand very well working for peace. There is no beginning and no end. We must continuously begin again and never become discouraged."

On the day the elections results were announced, the coalition organized a "Bon Chlong Wiel Bey," a festival. Thousands walked through the streets, ending in front of the palace where birds were released in a gesture of freedom and balloons flown with peace messages. As the name of this festival in Khmer indicates crossing three "deserts," Maha Ghosananda explained how we have crossed the deserts of hatred, greed and delusion which are the causes of war. "Like our breath, in and out, like day and night, war and peace are always interchanging. Nothing is permanent. One leads to the other. Now we leave suffering and enter peace."

On Monday, June 14, at the first meeting of the new Constitutional Assembly, thousands of monks, nuns,

human rights activists and other non-governmental organizations and individuals gathered in front of the Assembly Building to encourage the new Constitutional Assembly in their noble task of preparing a new Constitution for Cambodia. They requested seats for representatives of monks, nuns, non-governmental organizations and people's committees as observers in the Assembly to make the period of writing the new Constitution a democratic process.

As the representatives entered the building, the group chanted prayers and blessings, read a statement and then sat in meditation outside during the session, again raising banners as the delegates left.

The coalition will lobby for a Bill of Rights, for an independent judiciary and for the advancement of women. The group obtained continued coverage of all events by both local as well as international media.

In less than a month, the Peace Movement has empowered people and has given leaders new experience, strength and inspiration. New leaders/groups have sprung up over the past four weeks, breaking the silence of a people accustomed to living in an environment dominated by fear and intimidation. The people clearly want to show their newly elected leaders a way which serves and respects the people's right to live in dignity. ☸



Samdech Preah Maha Ghosananda
would like to establish a center
in the Paris, France, area. \$500,000 is
needed to purchase the land.
For information on how you could help,
please contact:

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